



wasatch range writing project
By Patty Becnel

Lesson Title: Essential Questions

Burning Question: How can using an essential question require students to think use higher levels of thinking?
What is an essential question?

Objectives:

- To explain the purpose of an essential question(to require deeper analysis and thinking about a subject/topic.
- To give examples of essential questions.
- To give a breakdown of higher order thinking skills.

Context: Any discipline

Materials:

Time Span: 15 minutes – 1 class period

Procedures:

1. Explain the purpose of an essential question.
2. Provide hand out of levels of thinking to students (i.e. Costa, Bloom)
3. Demonstrate asking questions by using a common text (i.e. The Three Little Pigs)
4. Have students devise at least two questions for each level

Level 1- On the lines

These are questions where you can point to the answers.

i.e. Who are the main characters?

Level 2- Between the lines-

The reader searches for clues in the text and searches for answers

i.e. Why were pigs 1 and 2 unsafe in the homes they had built?

Level 3- Beyond the lines

The reader makes links between the text and his own experience and knowledge.

i.e. Do you think the pig was justified in killing the wolf. Support your answer with evidence from the text and your experiences.

5. Give students a list of questions. Have them determine which would be essential questions and why.

Extensions: Have students choose one essential question of interest to them. Have them create a mind map or other form of graphic organizer to create a list of all the things they would need to know in order to answer this question.

Rationale: Using an essential question when doing any type of short or long term research requires the students to move beyond knowledge based questions and think more deeply about a topic. Having them analyze and possibly create essential questions gives them experience with the skill and the basic knowledge necessary to add rigor to their research.

Resources:

Essential question example list
Costa's Level of Questioning

Essential Questions

Decide if the following statements could be essential questions. If NOT, change them so they are.

Remember, an essential question needs to:

- Be debatable
- Require synthesis to formulate an opinion about (Read and assess many different opinions and then synthesize it- put it together)
- The answer cannot be pointed to

Is obesity is an epidemic?

Does capital punishment kill innocent people?

Are people moral creatures.?

Is a Middle Eastern way of life is very different than an American way of Life?

Does most success derive from luck?

Is war ever justified?

Is money the root of all evil?

Should unfit people be sterilized?

Should scientists be able to develop a master race of people?

Was Hitler the greatest evil in the world?

Are people who commit suicide weak?

Why aren't schools democratic?

Is the United States a democracy?

Should the Electoral College be abolished?

Would an amnesty program for immigrants who have been in the US over ten years benefit the country?

Should wealthy nations support education in impoverished countries?

Do all people deserve an education?

Why is gay marriage illegal in Utah?

Is obesity the biggest health concern in the US?

Should students have rights?

Do lobbyists cause a breakdown of political values?

Do all countries need to prepare for the affects of global warming?

Does eating a meat based diet contribute to global warming?

Could those truly in love abuse one another?

Would America would be a better place if the South had succeeded from the Union?

Should teachers require homework?

Should school be mandatory?

Should college should be free?

What is the single greatest achievement in the world? In the last 100 years?

Should recycling be mandatory?

Should our nation invest more money in defense or in renewable energies?

Is technology ruining our country?

Is technology making us dumber?

Should women have the same rights as men?

How could our society curb the obesity epidemic?

List 2: Essential Questions- An essential question will require a student to think more deeply and analyze a situation before coming to a conclusion.

1. Is global climate change man-made? ([Find Sources](#))
2. Is the death penalty effective? ([Find Sources](#))
3. Is our election process fair?
4. Do colleges put too much stock in standardized test scores? ([Find Sources](#))
5. Is torture ever acceptable?
6. Should men get paternity leave from work?
7. Is a lottery a good idea?
8. Do we have a fair taxation system?
9. Do curfews keep teens out of trouble?
10. Is [cheating](#) out of control?
11. Are we too dependent on computers?
12. Are parents clueless about child predators on the Internet?
13. Should animals be used for research?
14. Should cigarette smoking be banned?
15. Are cell phones dangerous?
16. Are law enforcement cameras an invasion of privacy?
17. Are test scores a good indication of a school's competency?
18. Do we have a throw-away society?
19. Is child behavior better or worse than it was years ago?
20. Should companies market to children?
21. Should the government have a say in our diets?
22. Does access to condoms prevent teen pregnancy?
23. Does access to condoms lead to irresponsible, dangerous, or bad behavior?
24. Are actors and professional athletes paid too much?
25. Are CEOs paid too much?
26. Do violent video games cause behavior problems?
27. Should creationism be taught in public schools?
28. Are beauty pageants exploitive?
29. Should English be the official language in the United States?
30. Should the racing industry be forced to use biofuels?
31. When should parents let teens make their own decisions?
33. Should the military be allowed to recruit at high schools?
34. Should the alcoholic drinking age be increased or decreased?
35. Does age matter in relationships?
36. What age is appropriate for dating?
37. Should gay couples be able to marry?
38. Are there benefits to attending a single-sex school?
39. Does boredom lead to trouble?
40. Does participation in sports keep teens out of trouble?
41. Is competition good?
42. Does religion cause war?
43. Should the government provide health care?
44. Should girls ask boys out?
45. Is fashion important?
46. Are girls too mean to each other?
47. Is homework harmful or helpful?
48. Should students be allowed to grade their teachers?
49. Is the cost of college too high?
50. Is college admission too competitive?